

# GURU NANAK - PROPHET OF A UNIQUE IDEOLOGY

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## INTRODUCTION

In this essay, we shall attempt to outline that the religion of Guru Nanak is unique in many ways. For, Guru Nanak is the first man of God to break in India the dichotomy between the spiritual life and the empirical life of man and to establish a clear and integral combination between the two. His was not what is termed a salvation religion; in fact, in his religion, he specifically linked the spiritual salvation of man with his social salvation. That is also why in its ideology and its doctrines, Sikhism is radically different from all the earlier Eastern and contemporary Indian religions. This linkage is of immense and revolutionary importance which many students of religion have failed to grasp. In this context, we shall explain i) what is the spiritual experience of the Gurus and what is the kind of reality of God which Guru Nanak proclaims, ii) what is unique about the spiritual system of Guru Nanak and which radical departures he makes from the other spiritual systems that had arisen in India, iii) why Guru Nanak chose the householder's life to be the forum of spiritual growth and what are its logical implications, iv) why Guru Nanak started the system of succession, why the system of succession was continued by the Fifth Guru, even after the Sikh Scripture had been compiled and authenticated by him and why the Tenth Guru stopped the institution of succession, and v) why persons belonging to the pacifist religions find it difficult to understand the spiritual system and the historical role of the Sikh Gurus. For this reason, we shall state, as briefly as possible, only those aspects of Guru Nanak's system that are strictly relevant to our present discussion.

## IDEA OF GOD AND SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE

Guru Nanak is a monotheist; but to say that is to say very little about him because monotheism has a number of varieties, and the classification of his system merely as monotheism would only confuse the issue. First, it is necessary to know what is the nature of the spiritual experience of the Gurus. It is because of a significant variation in this religious experience that doctrinal changes arise. For the Gurus "God is All Love and the rest He is ineffable."<sup>1</sup> In other mystic systems as detailed by Stace, this religious experience is in the nature of blessedness, peace, holiness, universal-consciousness, etc<sup>2</sup>. In the Hindu systems, too, it is "Truth, Consciousness and Bliss", (*Sat Chit Anand*). Secondly, it is important to know what kind of God, Guru Nanak envisages and how he defines his system and more especially how to live it and carry out his mission. In fact, it is the lives of Guru Nanak and other Gurus that explain and illustrate the logic of his system, namely, Sikhism. For Guru Nanak, God is both Transcendent and Immanent. "He that permeates all hearts is

transcendent too.<sup>13</sup> He mentions numerous aspects of God but in this essay we shall primarily be concerned with the Attributive, the Loving and the Creative aspects of God whom he calls the Ocean of virtues, Creative, Benevolent and Gracious. "In the realm of truth is the Sole One, Ever Creative, keeping a Benevolent and Gracious eye on the universe."<sup>14</sup> This perception of the Guru about God has fundamental implications. Let us just mention five of them. The first inference is that the universe is real and meaningful. For, attributes of God could be expressed only in a real world. Because when God was by Himself, the question of the expression of love and other attributes of God could not arise. Thus, this description of God gives both authenticity and spiritual significance to the world of man and his life. This inference is entirely opposed to the earlier Buddhist approach which believes the world to be a place of suffering, involving consequential withdrawal from it to a monastic life. Even the Vedantic approach considers the world to be *mithya* and world activity to be just illusory. In order to illustrate this point and the contrast between the approach of Sankra and that of Guru Nanak, let us just quote them. Guru Nanak sings:

The sun and moon, O Lord, are Thy lamps;  
The firmament Thy salver,  
The orbs of the stars the pearls encased in it.  
The perfume of the sandal is Thine incense,  
The wind is Thy fan, all the forests are Thy flowers,  
O Lord of light, what worship is this, O Thou, Destroyer of birth?

Unbeaten strains of ecstasy are the trumpets of Thy worship.  
Thou has a thousand eyes and yet not one eye;  
Thou has a thousand forms and yet not one form;  
Thou has a thousand stainless feet and yet not one foot;  
Thou has a thousand organs of smell and yet not one organ.  
I am fascinated by this play of Thine;  
The light which is in everything is Thine, O Lord of light.  
From its brilliance everything is brilliant;  
By the Guru's teaching the light becometh manifest.  
What pleaseth Thee is the real worship.

O God, my mind is fascinated with Thy lotus feet  
As the bumble-bee with the flower; night and day I thirst for them.  
Give the water of Thy favour to the Sarang (bird) Nanak,  
So that he may dwell in Thy name.

Sankara writes

"I am not a combination of the five perishable elements. I am neither body, the senses, nor what is in the body (*antar-anga*: i.e., the mind). I am not the ego-function; I am not the group of the vital breath-forces; I am

not intuitive intelligence (*buddhi*). Far from wife and son am I, far from land and wealth and other notions of that kind. I am the witness, the Eternal, the Inner Self, the Blissful One (*sivo-ham*; suggesting also, 'I am Siva')."

"Owing to ignorance of the rope, the rope appears to be a snake; owing to ignorance of the Self the transient state arises of the individualized, limited, phenomenal aspect of the Self. The rope becomes a snake when the false impression disappears because of the statement of some credible person; because of the statement of my teacher I am not an individual life-monad (*jivo-naham*). I am the Blissful One (*sivo-ham*).

" am not the born; how can there be either birth or death for me? " am not the vital air; how can there be either hunger or thirst for me? " am not the mind, the organ of thought and feeling; how can there be

either sorrow or delusion for me?

" am not the doer; how can there be either bondage or release for me? " am neither male nor female, nor am I sexless. I am the Peaceful One, whose form is self-effulgent, powerful radiance. I am neither a child, a Young man, nor an ancient; nor am I of any caste. I do not belong to one of the four life-stages. I am the Blessed-Peaceful One, who is the only Cause of the origin and dissolution of the world."

While Guru Nanak is bewitched by the beauty of His creation and sees in the panorama of nature a lovely scene of the worshipful adoration of the Lord, Sankara in his hymn rejects the reality of the world and treats himself as the sole Reality. Zimmer feels that "Such holy megalomania goes past the bounds of sense. With Sankara, the grandeur of the supreme human experience becomes intellectualised and reveals its inhuman sterility."<sup>5</sup>

According to the Guru the world is not only real but it is a meaningful place where alone God's Creative and Attributive Will works. Secondly, and this is very important, it gives a clear direction as to the way the Attributive Will of God works. It sets the goal for man. Thirdly, God being riches to the poor, milk to the child and eyes to the blind <sup>6</sup>, the seeker has to follow the ethical path of values and virtues laid down by God and the Guru. This lays down the methodology and ethics for the spiritual path. Fourthly, it shows how intimate is God's interest in the world and its progress. Not only is God the Sustainer of life, but He also nurtures it with a loving care. God is described as the Enlightener or Guru. This gives great hopes and confidence to man in his spiritual endeavours. Fifthly, it lends a clear spiritual character to the ethical and moral life of man. Thus, in Sikhism moral life by itself gains spiritual colour and character. Because, the world being a creation of God, and God being the Ocean of virtues, moral life is in line with the Attributive Will of God. In the Japuji, the Guru clearly lays down that the ideal life for man or the *sachiara* is to move and work in accordance with the Will of God.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, in Sikhism the spiritual life and the empirical life are clearly and closely linked. The dichotomy between these two kinds of lives as it exists in most other traditions is emphatically removed. We shall amplify this point later.

In short, the attributive aspect of God logically generates an attitude of life-affirmation in the religious man. We shall now explain the major implications of this approach and see how widely contrasted these are with the features of other Indian religions.

## THE PATH OF LOVE

A revolutionary system in which the dichotomy between the spiritual life and the empirical life of man was emphatically broken.

It was Guru Nanak who laid and led the path of universal love and the emancipation of man without distinction of caste and creed. The call for this mission was given by him in unambiguous terms. "If you want to tread the path of love, come forward with your head on your palm."<sup>8</sup> And his mission, as mentioned earlier, was to ferry man across the turbulent sea of life. It is clear that in Guru Nanak's mission of love, two objectives became logically uppermost and these he emphasized unambiguously in his *bani*, namely, that he was to establish equality and fraternity among men, and that it was the duty and responsibility of the religious man and the religious society he was creating, to resist oppression and safeguard human rights and values. It is in this context that the importance of Guru Nanak's criticism of the doctrine of *Ahimsa* should be understood. "Men discriminate not and quarrel over meat-eating, they do not know what is flesh and what is non-flesh, or what is sin and what is not sin."<sup>9</sup> Life, he said, was in every grain of corn or seed.<sup>10</sup> Again, it is in this background that we have to charter the course of Sikh history from Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh. After Guru Nanak, the period of the next three Gurus relates mainly to the creation, expansion, and organisation of a cohesive society or Panth Guru Nanak had started. The next major landmark was the time of the Fifth Guru, who not only compiled the scripture of the new society, thereby weaning it away from all earlier beliefs, sought confrontation with the empire and not only made the supreme sacrifice of his life and set the tradition of martyrdom but also created in his life time what Dr Gupta calls "a state within a State." No wonder emperor Jahangir took note of this mounting challenge, and attacked the Sikh society. For him, the movement was of such importance and potentialities that he not only took personal note of it and ordered it to be demolished, but also found this event to be of such great socio-political significance as to be mentioned in his autobiography.<sup>11</sup>

Guru Nanak brought about a complete reversal of the socio-religious life and values of his time. Against life-negation and withdrawal from life, he recommended life-affirmation and complete social participation. Against monasticism and asceticism, he accepted a householder's life and full social

responsibility. Against celibacy and the concept of woman being sin-born, he gave religious sanctity to married life and equality to women. Against the rigidity of the *Varan Ashram Dharama* and the institution of caste and pollution, he, from the very first day of his mission, accepted and practised social equality and the brotherhood of man. This act of Guru Nanak after his enlightenment and his first words that "there is no Hindu nor Muslim" are extremely meaningful. At least two points stand emphasized. First, that in his thesis and mission, deed was of primary importance; and, second, that human equality and consequent social responsibility were to constitute the bedrock of his mission. Against the world being *mithya* and a suffering, he found it to be real, beautiful and the realm for the spiritual growth of man. Against *tapas*, ritualism and meditation alone, he accepted the primacy of work and one's religious assessment being based purely on man's deeds, i.e., moral deeds, in this world. Asceticism and *ahimsa* are the fundamental features of all Indian religions. But, Guru Nanak rejected both of these doctrines. And, considering the tunes in which he was born, nothing could be more radical or revolutionary. Because it is one of the few systems of the world in which the dichotomy between the spiritual life of the soul and the temporal life of the body has been broken and an inalienable link between the two established. In order to distinguish such a system from a quietist religion, Hocking and Iqbal call it a Prophetic Religion. Otto calls such a system Activity Religion as distinguished from the Vedantic system of Sankara. Here the goal is to work in all walks of life as the instrument of God's Attributive Will, and not to withdraw or isolate oneself from the world in order to merge in The Absolute, Void, or Godhead, or to achieve a blissful and tranquil union with God as an end in itself. For Plotinus or Sankara, after the final spiritual achievement, activity is a fall. Even in Mahayana Buddhism, after nirvana there is no return, much less moral activity or expression of compassion which ends at the penultimate stage of *ahrat*. But, for the *sachiara* or the superman, even after being in tune with God, it is essential to carry out His Attributive Will. In fact, he prays not for *moksha* but "for millions of hands to serve Him."<sup>12</sup>

#### HOUSEHOLDER'S LIFE TO BE THE FORUM OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH

In Guru Nanak's system, thus, asceticism, renunciation and withdrawal from life were completely rejected. Not only Guru Nanak, but all the Gurus, except Guru Harkrishan who died at an early age, were married householders. It is significant that after return from his missionary tours, Guru Nanak settled at Kartarpur as a peasant, sent for his wife, worked and preached there to the end of his days. Again, when he appointed Guru Angad to be his successor, he advised him to send for the members of his family and settle at Khadur Sahib and carry out the mission entrusted to him. In fact, when Guru Nanak later visited him and found him living a somewhat quietist life, he advised him to be active as he had to organise a community and fulfil

the mission entrusted to him.<sup>13</sup> It was Guru Nanak who stated that "his mission was, with the help of other God-conscious persons to ferry everyone across the sea of life"<sup>14</sup> i.e., his aim was social salvation of the society as a whole and not the individual salvation of a few or a group only. It is in this light that we have to understand why the second and third Gurus, while they included anyone in their society, without distinction of class and caste, excluded recluses (ascetic celibates) from being members of the Sikh society, and that is also why the Guru condemned the Yogis for being idlers and their not being ashamed of begging for alms at the very doors of the householders whose life they spurned<sup>15</sup>. In fact, the Guru envisaged all problems of life to be religious problems to be solved in a righteous or truthful way. That is also why Guru Nanak says, "Truth is the highest of all but higher still is truthful living,"<sup>16</sup> and that is also why Guru Nanak's system of moral life is of the highest significance. For, he lays down that all assessment of man will be based on his deeds in this world and, it is by our deeds that we become near or away from God.<sup>17</sup> All these are, indeed, corollaries of the world-view of "despise not the world, it being the creation of God."<sup>18</sup>

It is in this context that we should understand why it is Guru Nanak who not only identified and commented upon all the social and political problems of his ideology and the foundations of the Sikh society that was created to solve those problems.

We indicate here his comments and views on some of the major social issues of his times. Allied with the issue of life-affirmation is the matter of the status of women in the society. Before we record Guru Nanak's view on the subject, it would be relevant to state the position of women in the then contemporary world. The Digambara Jains believed that a woman could not attain Moksha or salvation and that she must first be incarnated as a male before she could reach *kavaliya*.<sup>19</sup> Buddha very reluctantly agreed to enrol women as Bhikshu. Even after entry in the Bhikshu order, her status remained second rate. The woman Bhikshu even if she were an old entrant in the Bhikshu order was considered junior to a male Bhikshu who joined the order later than she had done<sup>20</sup>. The male monk was not supposed to rescue a drowning woman even if she were his own mother.<sup>21</sup> In the caste order of the Brahmans, a woman had been classed with the Shudras. For Sankara, woman was the gateway to hell.<sup>22</sup> Even in the liberal Vaishnav order of Ramanuja or Shankra deva of Assam, women were not accepted as Vaishnavas. She was deemed to be basically a temptress or sin born. Shankra deva, a liberal saint of the later Bhakti movement, felt that "of all the terrible aspirations of the world, a woman's is the ugliest. A slight side glance of hers captivates even the heart of celebrated sages. Her sight destroys penance and meditation. Knowing this, the wise keep away from the company of women."<sup>23</sup> Nathism was another religious cult when Guru Nanak appeared on the religious scene. "A

Nath had to take a vow not to marry and they did not even sit or dine with Nath women.<sup>24</sup> It is also significant to record that the attitude of a saint like Bhagat Kabir towards women has been considered to be that of a misogynist<sup>25</sup>. Even Christian missionaries had extended their organisation to India in the time of Guru Nanak. In Catholic Christianity women have not been ordained as priests even upto today. It was in this climate that Guru Nanak spoke "why call woman impure when without woman there would be none."<sup>26</sup> The contrasted position of women in the Sikh society was such that later when the Third Guru created districts of religious administration, women were appointed to head some of them.

Another major problem of the times was the social ideology of caste which had a triple limitation. First, it was basically hierarchical. Men were deemed unequal by birth, the Brahman caste being at the top of the ladder and the Shudras being at the bottom of it. Apart from that, social intercourse between the Shudra castes and the upper three castes was virtually barred. In fact, the institutions of untouchability and pollution were a fact of the social life of the times. Thirdly, apart from the fact that a person could take up only the profession of his caste or sub-caste, a change of profession was religiously barred. The Bhagavad Gita clearly laid down that it was religiously, more meritorious to do, even inefficiently, the duties of one's own caste or ancestral profession than to do efficiently the duties of another caste or profession<sup>28</sup>. In this background it is extremely significant that Guru Nanak's first statement after his enlightenment was that there was no Hindu or Musalman, meaning thereby that he saw only man everywhere, the distinction of caste and inequality being irreligious and an impediment in the path of spirituality. When Guru Nanak started his missionary tours, his sole companion was a low caste Muslim. It was, thus, a categorical declaration that in his society or system no one who had any belief in caste prejudices or discriminations could have any place. And when he returned from his tours he established the institutions of *langar*, *sangat* and *pangat* which meant that his disciples not only mixed and worked together, but also sat, and ate together without distinctions of caste i.e., had a kitchen for having common and free meals. In fact, even during his tours he had organised local *sangats* (societies) on the above lines. The record of Bhai Gurdas about the caste constitution of the Sikhs shows that all kinds of castes, including low castes were members of the Sikh societies of those times. In the conditions of that period, nothing could be more revolutionary than to establish the brotherhood of man and to say that the Vedas had wrongly laid down the distinction of caste.<sup>29</sup>

An important corollary of the approach of life-affirmation is the institution of work. It is very significant to find that Guru Nanak, after his return from his missionary tours, regularly worked as a peasant. And this practice of earning one's livelihood was followed by his successors as well. The Guru says, "The person incapable of earning his living gets his ears split

and becomes a mendicant. He calls himself a guru or saint. Do not look up to him, nor touch his feet. He knows the way who earns his living and shares his earning with others."<sup>30</sup> A marked work-ethics in the Sikh society is the direct result of the teachings of and the precedents set by Guru Nanak and the other Gurus. For no society can thrive and flourish for long in health unless the dignity and necessity of work are accepted as a virtue and as a part of one's socio-religious responsibility. Consequently, there has, from the very start, been a clear rejection of the institutions of monasticism, asceticism, renunciation and other-worldliness.

Lastly, we mention his criticism of the rulers and the invaders of the time. In the Babar Vani, he notably condemns the oppression of the invaders and also the moral unpreparedness of the local rulers. It is important to understand that this was not just idle criticism; the Guru was very serious and meaningful about it. In his verses he even complains to God, as the Master of the human flock, for not protecting the weak and allowing them to be trampled upon by the strong.<sup>31</sup> This important criticism displays a fundamental feature of his spiritual thesis. It is, indeed, unfortunate that many of the scholars, and more especially those committed to pacifist doctrines, have completely missed the basic significance of this criticism by Guru Nanak. For when, he criticises even God for allowing oppression of the weak to take place, how could he preclude the god-man from accepting the responsibility of resisting or undoing oppression or encroachment on the basic human rights of man. Guru Nanak's criticism, as we have seen, is loud and significant. It is not an empty rhetoric. Its meaning is clear. Since God is the 'Destroyer of the oppressor or the evil,' 'Slayer of the enemy' and 'Helper of the helpless', this criticism naturally casts a clear responsibility on the god-man with an attitude of life-affirmation to create the wherewithal for resistance. In this connection the clarification given (in reply to a question by sant Ram Das of Maharashtra) by the Sixth Guru, that Guru Nanak had given up mammon and not the worldly life as such, and that his sword was for the destruction of the oppressor and the defence of the weak, is very significant and revealing of Guru Nanak's system and mission.<sup>33</sup> Further, it is important to understand that the doctrine of *miri and piri* is the natural and inevitable corollary of the path of love and the service of man, of the rejection of asceticism and monasticism, of the acceptance of the householder's life, and of securing justice, equality and freedom for all. For once the householder's life becomes the forum of spiritual growth and activity, the man of religion has to accept total responsibility for repelling all attacks on the moral life and interests of man, from whatever quarters, whether social or political, those should emanate. It is for this reason that Guru Tegh Bahadur, who was considered by the state to be organising a rebellion against the Empire, spurned the offer of the Emperor that if he gave up his political activities and confined to only religious preachings, he would get imperial grants.<sup>34</sup>



## THE INSTITUTION OF SUCCESSION AND TEN MASTERS

This sense of social responsibility in the god-man clearly involves that he has to create institutions and a society with which he could, to an extent, solve the problems of oppression, aggression, discrimination, and conflict. The god-man does no miracles, but, as the instrument of God, he is obliged to create the necessary means and institutions for resisting political and social oppression and social or caste discrimination. But, socio-political oppression and injustice can be countered only by a committed and motivated society and not just by individuals, nor by mere preachings. Accordingly, new institutions had to be created and faulty institutions had to be supplanted. And, obviously, this great task could not be accomplished in one generation. A society with new motivations and ideals, and new cultural patterns, had to be created, wholly divorced from the hierarchical and the divisive caste society of the times. It is in the above context that we have to understand Guru Nanak's organisation of Sikh *sangats* at all the places he visited and the appointment of a successor who was given a clear direction not to be a quietist but to organise a Panth or a society with the mission as mentioned above. An important feature of Guru Nanak's mission is the appointment of a successor and the line of Ten Masters. If it were a question merely of communication of his spiritual thesis, the *bani* of Guru Nanak completely embodied the same and no new fundamental was added to it in the *bani* of the subsequent Gurus. Again, if it were merely the question of personal or individual salvation, or of creating a comprehensive scripture, the role of the last five Gurus cannot be understood. Because so far as the scripture was concerned, the same had been compiled and created by the Fifth Guru. The entire objective of his mission becomes clear only if one accepts that Guru Nanak's ideal was equally the social salvation of man and the creation of a God-oriented society that was to resist and combat the evils he had enumerated. That society had to seek to solve the social problems he had identified in his *bani*. In fact, Guru Nanak's mission would have been unfulfilled, if he had not created the institution of succession in order to create and organise a society, or if the Fifth Guru had stopped the succession after the compilation of the *Adi Granth*. For, without\* the appearance of the Tenth Master and the creation of the *Khalsa*, Guru Nanak's mission would have remained incomplete. Sainapat clearly records that the creation of the *Khalsa* was an important goal of the Guru which was revealed on the Baisakhi day of 1699 A.D.<sup>35</sup> It is only in the context of his socio-religious ideals that the role of each of the subsequent Gurus, particularly that of the Tenth Master to create the *Khalsa* Panth and stop the line of further Gurus, becomes clear. The emphatic point that emerges is that for Guru Nanak's religious thesis the creation of a Panth or a society motivated with the Guru's religious ideals was essential. In pursuance of this mission the institution of succession and the logically integrated work of the nine succeeding masters culminating in the final creation of the *Khalsa* are parts of a clearly

directed historical process. This is also evident from the doctrine of Five Freedoms (Nash Doctrines) gained by the Sikh when he was initiated into the Khalsa and given Amrit (baptised). Guru Gobind Singh clearly stressed the radical departure Guru Nanak's system had made from the earlier religious systems. The five freedoms were freedom from all the earlier religious traditions or systems, freedom from the shackles of the earlier practices and deeds, freedom from the influence of caste or family lineage, freedom from the stigma attached to any profession or the compulsion to follow a hereditary calling, and freedom from any earlier inhibition, prejudices or rituals. The Amrit ceremony prominently signified a clear break with the earlier religious systems, customs or practices. Since human prejudices, conditionings, and fixations die hard, the new religious and cultural orientation of an entire society had to take a long time, especially when in most of its religious principles and doctrines it had completely Deviated from the path of the traditional systems.

Here it is necessary to mention the important episode of the first Baisakhi day (1699 AD). After Guru Gobind Singh selected the Five Piaras (The beloved ones), baptised them, i.e., performed the Amrit ceremony, and created the Khalsa, he requested and insisted that the five baptised Sikh, the select leaders of the Khalsa Panth, should formally baptise the Tenth Master as a Singh. This event is in many ways of a crucial and revealing significance. It happened when the sons of the Guru were still alive. It indicates as recorded by Sainapat, that the event epitomised the culminating act in the mission of Guru Nanak, that the socio-religious Sikh society had become mature enough to carry forward the mission of the Gurus now entrusted to them, that the line of personal Gurus to guide the Sikhs would end as no longer necessary, and that the Sikh society would be able to play its historical role. The lessons of this episode are too evident to be missed. Guru Nanak proclaimed that he had been charged with a mission. His spiritual thesis stands embodied in the authenticated scripture, Guru Granth Sahib, the doctrinal guide. The lives of the ten Gurus amply and completely illustrate how the spiritual thesis had to be implemented. Henceforward the Tenth Master closed the earlier chapter and placed the responsibility of future action squarely on the shoulders of the Khalsa, the 'Guru Panth'. 'Shabad' or Guru Granth Sahib became the scripture, or the thesis, and the Khalsa, the society created by the Guru, became the instrument.

In the light of the mission of Guru Nanak let us now see the role played by his society in the late seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries. In its internal constitution and social intercourses and mobility, it was casteless, with complete fraternity amongst its members. Without a deep cohesion and commitment to its mission, it could never challenge the empire which was out to destroy it root and branch, and had placed a price on the head of every Sikh. Significantly, it was a revolutionary religious society, constituted of a

committed people, and led by persons who in the Brahmanical society were considered to be the lowest. Rangrettas, Kalals, Shudras were its generals and leaders. The marvel of this achievement can be gauged by the fact that in the Indian society in 1947, after India attained Independence, the Prime Minister of India and the Chief Ministers of practically all the States belonged to the Brahman class. Even in the French Revolution which took place half a century later, the leadership of the revolutionary movement was always with the middle class and not with the peasants or the fourth estate.

Externally, the achievement of the society was the uprooting of the mughal empire in the north-western India. What we wish to emphasize is the evident relation between the criticism by Guru Nanak in his Babar Vani and the achievements of his society in securing complete freedom not only from the Mughal yoke but once for all from the march of invading hordes that plagued the country for almost a thousand years. This explains the dictum that the steel of the sword of Guru Gobind Singh and the Khalsa was created and welded by Guru Nanak.

Basically, Guru Nanak was not only the prophet of the individual or personal salvation of man, but in his religious system the personal salvation of man and the social salvation of the community of men were intimately and inalienably linked. It is true, that as in the case of Neo-Platonism and Sufism, salvation religions and monasticism arise when cultures are in decay and weary, and men of religion, finding the challenges of life and society to be too great to deal with, seek refuge in renunciation, asceticism, stoicism, and Ahimsa. In fact, all such religious movements involve, by and large, withdrawal from life. But, on the other hand, a religion like that of Guru Nanak distinctly aims at the social salvation of man by the creation of new institutions and culture. A typical instance of the former is Neo-Platonism that arose when Greek culture and character were at its lowest ebb. As against it, we have referred to the system of Guru Nanak and the role of a society that brought about social freedom and salvation of man in north-western India. It is, thus, a religion that seeks to break the dichotomy between the spiritual life and the empirical life of man. It is in this light that we have to understand the natural and inevitable combination between the thesis of Guru Nanak and the role of the Tenth Master in the creation of the Khalsa and its historical operation and achievements.

Even today all misinterpretations of the Sikh religion and its history are partly due to the failure to understand the significance of the institution of succession of the Ten Masters, the creation of the Khalsa, and closing the line of succession by entrusting the Guruship to the Guru Granth. The need and the uniqueness of this institution become glaringly clear when the ideology and the mission of Guru Nanak are properly understood as laid down in his *bani*. For that matter any interpretation of his thesis which fails to grasp these basic points is just naive.

It is Guru Nanak's radical break with all the earlier religious systems in India that has caused, among votaries of other religious or cultural systems, a problem of understanding Sikhism. Persons conditioned by quietist or pacifist traditions or thinking find it hard to grasp the inalienable unity of Guru Nanak-Guru Gobind Singh combination. This lack of understanding of his system occurred first with the Nath Yogis who finding him in a householder's garb asked him why he was pouring acid into the pure milk of spirituality by leading an ordinary householder's life. The Guru's reply to the Nath was that it was they who did not understand even the elementaries of the spiritual life because the Guru had in his hymns, unambiguously condemned withdrawal from life, asceticism and other-worldliness. The same problem occurred with Sant Ramdas of Maharashtra when he found Guru Hargobind riding a horse fully armed. He questioned him by saying that being a successor of Guru Nanak how he reconciled his military attire and role with the piety and saintliness of Guru Nanak. The Guru's reply was clear and categorical. 'Guru Nanak had given up mammon and not the world; my sword is for the defence of the weak and the destruction of the tyrant.' In equally emphatic words Dasam Granth repeated the same concept:

"He (Nanak) established religion in the Kali age.....  
 Nanak assumed the body of Angad.....  
 Afterwards Nanak was called Amar Das,  
 As one lamp is lit from another.....  
 And Amar Das became Ram Das,  
 The pious saw this, but not the fools,  
 Who thought them all distinct.  
 But some rare persons recognized that they were all one."

Thus, the Gurus themselves have clarified and stressed the radical character and the unity of the Sikh thought and doctrines when some religious men of their times, because of their own education under earlier religions, failed to grasp the integrity of Sikhism. The difficulty of rising above the conditioning of one's own training and tradition is so great that even a historian like Toynbee, with a pacifist Christian background, fails to understand the philosophy of Islam and attacks the role of prophet Mohammad for his politico-military activities. Similarly, Mahatma Gandhi, Rabindra Nath Tagore, Jadu Nath Sarkar have violently criticized Guru Gobind Singh for his militancy and wars with the Mughal Empire. In contrast Pir Budhu Shah, a Muslim saint, was so bewitched and inspired by the spiritual stature of Guru Gobind Singh that he not only joined and aided his struggles but two of his sons also lost their lives while fighting in the forces of the Guru. History hardly recorded the like instance of a saint sacrificing the lives of his sons for the cause of a person of an opposing faith especially when his co-religionist should

be heading the Empire of the day. For Pir Budhu Shah, it was the cause of God that the Guru was fighting for. This unparalleled event that speaks volumes for the spiritual height of the Tenth Master, the devotees of pacifist or salvation religions are unable to understand, much less appreciate. Again it is a Muslim theologian and philosopher, Dr Muhammad Iqbal, who in the entire panorama of Indian history finds only two tall spiritual personalities, namely, Gautam Buddha and Guru Nanak who have enriched Indian religious thought and life with their light, vision, and wisdom. He says:

"The nation paid no heed to the message of Gautam;  
It failed to appreciate the value of its resplendent jewel,  
Ah! the ill-fated remained deaf to the Voice of Truth.  
The tree is unaware of the sweetness of its own fruit;  
He revealed to man the secret of life;  
But, India remained intoxicated with its speculations in philosophy;  
For, it was not a society the light of truth could illuminate;  
God's mercy rained, but the land was barren;  
Ah! for the Sudra, Hindustan is the house of sorrow,  
For its heart is devoid of the sap of compassion.  
The Brahman is still intoxicated with the wine of his ritualistic injunctions.  
The flame of Gautam is alight but in alien societies.  
After ages this house of false gods was illumined again;  
And, the light of God ( Ibrahim ) again radiated in the house of man ( Azhar );  
Then, arose in Punjab the call for the Oneness of spirit (Tauheed).  
And, the ideal man wakened India from its world of dreams."

James Lewis has also recorded the problem of western scholars in viewing Sikhism in its proper perspective and light. He writes: "Nevertheless because of the resonances which the Nanak-Gobind Singh contrast elicited from the inner tensions of European Christians, trace of the degenerationist paradigm was retained in discussions, particularly academic discussions, of the development of the Sikh religion. In fact, the theme of supposed contradiction between the early and later Sikhism, often carrying with it the same undertone of moral censure that it originally carried, is repeated in western discourse about Sikhism to this very day, and will, undoubtedly continue to be present in such discourse as long as scholars from Christian background fail to come to terms with the contradiction in their own culture.'

A question arises why it is that neither Indian nor western scholars are able to understand the philosophy of Guru Nanak-Guru Gobind Singh combination and its integrated unity and why only Muslim scholars and saints appreciate it. The reasons are obvious but doctrinal. In the Middle Eastern and the western religions and culture, it is only Prophet Muhammad who created a clear link between the spiritual and the empirical life of man. In the east it was only the Sikh Gurus who brought about this inalienable combina-

tion and did so despite the entire Indian tradition having been ascetic, monastic, other-worldly, pacifist and caste ridden. Both these religions as a necessary corollary of their thesis accept the use of force for a righteous public cause where other means fail to redress the wrong. For the Gurus, reason and force are both neutral tools of man. They have both been used and more often abused by him. But no life is possible without their discreet use for the good of the society. It is no accident that the story of Abu Ben Adam, suggesting that those who love man are more dear to God than those who love Him, is a product of the Muslim religious culture. The same idea is emphasized by Guru Nanak when he says that "Truth is the Highest, but higher still is truthful conduct or living." The lesson of the parable of Abu Ben Adam and of Guru Nanak's basic statement quoted above is the same, namely, the religious primacy of the goal of service of man. And, this goal can materialize only if the spiritual level of man is raised and strengthened by the divine sap of God-consciousness, and his egoism is increasingly subdued or curbed in the socio-political life.

### SIKHISM AND MODERNITY

A question arises how far is the system of Guru Nanak relevant to the problems of modern man? Scientism, evolutionism and materialism are the religions of the modern man. During the days of scientific euphoria in the second part of the 19th century and before the First World War, it was felt that the scientific outlook and progress would not only relieve man of his religious opiates and his sense of insecurity but these would also lead him to a future of hope and happiness. But the present day realities are far different, and even dismal, both in relation to his external and his internal environments. As to the external security and peace, the position is that apart from having two major world wars in the first half of this century we have, a decade before the closing of the century, fought over 50 bloody wars. In fact, man has killed, in the wars of the 20th century, more human beings than he did the world over in the earlier centuries. All this, and the colossal expenditure of about 1,000 billion dollars on armament each year, have, far from diminishing the danger of another war and increasing his sense of security, only added to his fears of the dreaded danger of a nuclear holocaust that might involve the death of life on this planet. The prospects of such an eventuality are so haunting that it has not only contributed to mental instability of the youth and to their lack of commitment or zest, but it has also given to them a feeling of the very meaninglessness of life, leading in consequence to the erosion of values and to seeking satiation of the baser instincts of man. No wonder a modern scholar, writing about this approach to life that science and our culture have adopted says, "This philosophy can lead to dead-end, the annihilation of mythology, religion, all value systems, all hope." On the moral side all values have been dubbed as a mere defence mechanism or a reaction formation which appear, they say, in human culture as the result of the impact of the

environment on the psyche of man. All this has further led to unbridled materialism and individualism and a serious questioning of the old value systems. For, we are told that all evolution and progress are due to a keen struggle of existence, involving the survival of the fittest. The result is a battered family system, a high rate of divorces, a rising number of mentally disturbed and insecure children, mutilated, lopsided and dwarfed personalities, and a mounting rate of drug-addiction and alcoholism. True, science has given us an amazingly equipped vehicle to drive. But, the tragedy is that the ape in man still continues to occupy the driver's seat.

It is in this context that, we believe, Guru Nanak's message is very relevant. For, he emphasizes that the problems of conflict and war, insecurity and frustration, and poverty and disease cannot be solved till man sheds his ego-centrism. Man, the Guru says, has both the opportunity and the destiny to be a superman i.e., to become God-centred instead of being ego-centred. His progress does not depend on the survival of a chance mutation but in his following the path of altruism; for, God's Will is altruistic. Instead of raising the dark spectacle of purposelessness and pessimism for the future of man, the Guru's message is of hope and meaningfulness. It is a message for God-consciousness, and for belief in both the transcendence and the immanence of God. The fundamental principle of Guru Nanak's religion is the establishment of a spiritual link between the individual salvation and the social salvation of man, and to emphasize that there can be no social salvation of man till his spiritual level is raised, and that there can be no spiritual salvation of man till it is integrated with his social salvation or till it is reflected in man's social field. Progress in the two fields is inseparable and mutually dependent or connected.

## CONCLUSION

The conclusion from our discussion is obvious. In the Indian and the Eastern context the thesis of an inalienable combination between the spiritual life of man and his empirical life was first enunciated, proclaimed and established by Guru Nanak. It is also equally evident that there was nothing in the Indian historical context and the environmental forces that could give rise to such a thesis. This gift to both the prophets, Nanak and Mohammad, was God given. Hence the problem of some pacifists, materialists and pseudo-scientific scholars to understand the world-view of Sikhism. Because the Gurus believe not only in the spiritual dimension of Reality but also that the best periods of human history are those when the spiritual and the empirical or rational dimensions of Reality are combined to lift man to new heights. Collingwood stresses the point aptly, "The discovery of a relation is at once the discovery of my thought as reaching God and of God's thought as reaching me; and indistinguishable from this, the performance of an act of mine by which I establish a relation with God and an act of God's by which he establishes a relation with me. To fancy that religion lives either below or

above the limits of reflective thought is fatally to misconceive either the nature of religion or the nature of reflective thought. It would be nearer the truth to say that in religion the life of reflection is concentrated in its intensest form, and that the special problems of theoretical and practical life all take their special forms by segregation out of the body of the religious consciousness, and retain their vitality only so far as they preserve their connexion with it and with each other in it." In Sikhism the ideal is the kingdom of God not in heaven but on earth, and in the creation of it man has to be the humble instrument of God. The Gurus repeatedly address man to give up his egocentric activities and rise to be a superman. "Among eighty-four lac of species, man is assigned the supreme position, whosoever misses the opportunity suffers the pain of transmigration."<sup>42</sup> "You have obtained the privilege of human birth, now is your opportunity to meet God."<sup>43</sup> And the role of the superman or *gurmukh* is to follow the path the Gurus treaded and led. For the seeker the path is to shed egoism by the practice of love and virtues and humbly to seek the grace of God to gain the perception of God-consciousness in order to be the instrument of God's Attributive Will. It is also important to understand that Sikhism is universal in its character and distinctly co-operative in its approach to other religions for the spirituo-social progress of man.

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The giving of love is an education in itself.  
— Eleanor Roosevelt



